Tigers population in Sariska Reserve

*253. SHRIMATISUKHBUNS KAUR:

SHRI S. M. LALJAN BASHA:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to refer to answer to unstarred question 524 given in Rajya Sabha on the 4th March, 2005 and to state:

(a) whether a World Wide Funds-for nature (WWF)-lndia, expert team has found that there is not a single sign of evidence-direct or indirect to indicate presence of tigers in Sariska Reserve;

(b) if so, the details o the findings of the WWF expert team in respect of Sariska Reserve, indicating the population of tigers in the reserve according to the last three counts and the causes of depletion in the tiger population; and

(c) the steps taken or being taken to protect, preserve and promote the tiger population in the Sariska and othe reserves and sanctuaries and the results thereof?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) and (b) Yes Sir. The report of the World Wide Funds-for Nature-India indicating their conclusion and recommendations are at Statement-I, while the population of tigers in the reserve as estimated by the state during the last three counts in at Statement-ll *(See* below). The Wildlife Institute of India has been directed to undertake a detailed ecological study in the Sariska Tiger Reserve area for ascertaining the status of wild animals and other related factors to facilitate conservation. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has also been asked to investigate whether poaching has led to the reported d isappearance of tigers in the Sariska Tiger Reserve. It is emphasized that the reported disappeaance of tigers at Sariska cannot be taken as established fact until the detailed ecological study by Wildlife Institute of India is completed.

(c) The States have been advised to ensure protection for tiger conservation through systemic improvement. The steps taken to protect and promote tiger conservation in the country are as below:

(i) Legal protection has been provided to wild animals including tigers against hunting and commercial exploitation under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

(ii) Financial and technical help is being extended to States under Centrally Sponsoed Schemes for enhancing the capacity and infrastructure to provide effective protection to wild animals.

(iii) The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has been empowered under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to apprehend and prosecute wildlife offenders.

(N) The Ministry of Home Affairs has addressed all State Governments to lend a helping hand to the field formations to curb poaching and illegal trade in wildlife.

(v) A National Wildlife Action Plan (2002—2016) has been launched with several action points and priority projects for conservation and protection of wildlife in the country.

Statement-I

Report of the World-wide Funds for Nature-India regarding tiger population in Sariska

In response to an invitation from the PCCF Rajasthan, a team from WWF—India visited Sariska tiger Reserve on 11th and 12th February to assist in the intensive search operations undertaken by Government from 1—15 February 2005 of locating tigers in the Sariska Tiger Reserve. The WWF—India team searched the entire area of the erstwhile stronghold of the tiger from Kamavas-Kalighati-Salopka-Pandupoleon both sides of the road and made the following observations:

1. It had been earlier claimed that about 300 persons had been employed in the search operations. The team saw no evidence of any intensive efforts being made by the Park authorities on 11th and 12th February 2005.
2. The area searched by the team: both during day and night time, revealed not a single sign of evidence, direct or indirect to indicate the continued presence of tiger in the areas that were the tiger's stronghold up to the first half of 2004. Discussions revealed that the search operations carried out by the staff had also drawn similar conclusions.
3. The last two reported sightings of tigers were on 14 July 2004 at the Salopka anicut and on 26 August 2004 near kalighati *Chowki.*

4. The entire area where once tigers roamed had cattle grazing freely. Head leads of wood were being removed by villagers even from areas where the personnel of the forest department are present on a permanent basis. This activity was seen within 500 meters of the entry gate on a day when even the Chief Wildlife warden was present in Sariska.

5. The forest staff were extremely reluctant to give any explanation for the disappearance of the tiger but tended to agree on the following possibilities:

   - The damage to the Park's tigers has taken place between July 2004 and December 2004.
   - The presence of 18 tigers as claimed by the Park in 2004 was probably an over estimation.
   - Poaching during the defined period can be the principal cause for the sudden disappearance of the tiger.
   - Negligence by the forest staff in regular monitoring is likely. Connivance of the lower staff with the poachers cannot be ruled out.

6. There appears to be a systemic failure in the Park's management. . Also the morale of the grassroots staff is at its lowest ebb.

7. 11-13 samples of scats had been collected by the forest staff during their search to WWF- India operation. All these were seen by the team. Only two of these appeared to be of tiges. However, as the shape had been disturbed during collection and later handling, a visual confirmation was not considered prudent and laboratory analysis by Wll is recommended. It would necessary to mention that both the samples in question were fairly old.

8. The forest guard at Salopka **Chowki* described scratch mark he had seen on top of the adjoining hill. The length of the mark indicated that it may have been made by a tiger.

9. We were informed that a villager by the name of Sriram had seen a tigress in the area known as Aalgwal. When contacted by the team, the person confirmed that he did see a large cat a few days back but was not in a position to confirm whether it was a tiger or a leopard.

10. The staff also confirmed that the leopard was being seen more freely in areas that were once the exclusive domain of the tiger. This indicates the absence of the tiger from these areas.

11. The postings of senior Park staff carried out on orders of the State Government need to be considered as one of the contributory causes.

- Shri Raghubir Singh Sekhawat served as the Deputy Director for a brief period from end February to May 2004. On being posted out in May 04, the post remained vacant till September 04. This is the crucial period during which most of the damage is believed to have taken place.
- In September, 04 the present Field Director, Shri S.K. Jain and the Deputy Director, Shri Priya Ranjan were posted in together. Both were new to the Park as they had not served in the area earlier. This caused some difficulty in management at the Park Headquarters level.
- A decision has now been taken to shift the Park Headquarters to Jaipur and that of the Deputy Director to Alwar. This will be counterproductive.

Conclusion and recommendations

1. The damage to Sariska Tiger Reserve is likely to have taken place between July and December 2004. If any tigers remain, their numbers are likely to be small.
2. There appears to be a systemic failure of the Park's management. Grazing and woodcutting is rampant and is taking place right in front of the staff who lack motivation and have an extremely low morale.
3. The need to adopt all possible measures to counter poaching cannot be over emphasized. While looking outwards for possible poachers, it may also be prudent to look inwards for possible involvement of the staff.
4. The decision to relocate the field Director and the Deputy Director needs reconsideration.

5. The Park still has no priority for the management of Cores 2 & 3. This needs to be corrected.
6. The relocation of villages pending since many years needs to be executed forthwith.
7. The top management must stay at Sariska and take up the challenge of rebuilding the Park.
8. Establish a core management Committee comprising of naturalists and conservation supporters who should hold quarterly meetings. Reports and feedback from the forest department and senior Govt, officials.
9. Make committee findigns public/involve people from Rajasthan who should play a constructive role.
10. Greater emphasis must be laid on patrolling and field leadership.
11. A fresh Management Plan for Sariska be made with inputs from the Committee.
12. Improve the corridor between Sariska and Ranthambore.
13. Activate the State Wildlife Advisory Board.
14. In case conditions do not improve by May 2005, a fresh plan of action be considered.

Statement—I

Population of tigers in the Sariska Tiger Reserves as reported by the State during last three census

SI.No. Name of Reserve	1995	1997	2001-02
1. Sariska (Rajasthan)	25	24	22
Total	25	24	22

Refusal by US and Australia to sign Kyoto Protocol

*255. PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that US and Australia have refused to sign Kyoto Protocol adopted by the International community;